1.1 Maine Land Trusts, Environmental Groups

Interview Type	Personal, Focus Group
Interview Location	MeGIS
Interview Date	October 31, 2001
Summary Date	December 20, 2001
Interviewer	AGI / Richard Sutton (rs@appgeo.com)
Interviewed:	

Colin Holme, Lakes Environmental Association, colin_holme@yahoo.com
Katherine Bither, Freeport Conservation Trust, kbither@bates.edu
Tarn Dickerson, Coastal Mountains Land Trust, tarnd@coastalmountains.org
Barbara Charry, Maine Audubon Society, bcharry@maineaudubon.org
Barb Welch, Frenchman Bay Conservancy, fbc@acadia.net
Jesse Jacobs, Maine Coast Heritage Trust, jjacobs@mcht.org
Maureen Hoffman, Sheepscot Valley Conservation Association, palmaur@lincoln.midcoast.com

URL(s): www.mainlakes.org
http://www.mltn.org/trusts/FCT.HTM
http://www.coastalmountains.org/
http://www.maineaudubon.org/
http://www.mltn.org/trusts/FBC.HTM
http://www.mcht.org/home.html
http://lincoln.midcoast.com/~svca/

1.1.1 Overview

Maine has one of the largest and strongest land trust networks in the United States. The Maine Land Trust Network, which serves as a coordinating service for trusts in the state, lists more than 90 of these on the active list on its site http://lincoln.midcoast.com/~svca/. The focus group participants represented numerous conservation and land stewardship organizations from within this network and throughout the state.

Despite their shared dedication to protection of open space and natural habitats, they held a wide array of opinions regarding the most appropriate use of geographic information systems and distribution of spatial data.

1.1.2 GIS Initiatives

1.1.2.1 Overview of GIS Utilization and Operating Environments

GIS is being used by all of the participants interviewed, but in varying capacities. ArcView 3.2 is the primary platform for display and query, though some of the larger organizations like Maine Audubon have and are using ArcInfo 8.1. All have plotters (though only a few have large format machines) and generally use the software for outputting presentation maps and tracking status of the properties they administer. High speed Internet access is generally unavailable. Other than the Maine Coast Heritage Trust all are using 56K dialup access. Paid staff among these organizations is rare, and there is a perceived difficulty in maintaining GIS expertise once it has been acquired.

1.1.2.2 GIS Data Resources and Requirements

1.1.2.2.1 Spatial Data

The spatial data needs of land trusts center around environmental layers and property parcel information. Most are spatial data consumers, using taxmap data from individual municipalities and environmental data from MeGIS, IF&W, and the Atlantic Salmon Commission. for presentation and analysis purposes. Aerial photography and MeGIS baselayers are used consistently, and there is general consensus that completing coverage statewide (especially of orthophotography) is a pressing need.

In some cases data are being automated to meet individual requirements. The Frenchman Bay Trust has been working with the College of the Atlantic and the JW Sewall Company to digitize parcels for 12 towns in Hancock County. These are mostly small, rural towns that are unlikely to automate parcels on their own. Adherence to standards and speed of production have suffered due to lack of funding for this project.

Other trusts are aggregating tax maps from individual towns to suit their planning and land tracking needs.

In many cases data are exchanged freely between non profits, municipalities and land trusts, but not with the private sector, and not to any strict specifications or requirements.

Currently unavailable but desired data sets include

- Conservation Lands layer including easements
- Phosphorus loading hotspots
- Accurate landuse for sprawl monitoring
- Statewide orthophotos
- Parcels throughout land trust jurisdictions
- E-911 roads data for all trust jurisdictions
- Shoreland zoning statewide
- Resource protection layers
- Wetlands better than current NWI layers
- Structures
- Better soils and slopes : steep slope polygon coverage
- Land cover / landuse, more accurate and current
- Utilities information, more accurate and current than presently available.
- Aquifers
- Wells

1.1.2.3 GIS Applications and Application Requirements

- Maine Audubon is actively tracking sprawl and identifying potential conservation land in the northern forest. In the Rangely area they are working toward

assembling the necessary data layers to perform technical buildout analyses. These include zoning, environmental constraints, built landscape and protected parcels.

- Most trusts are doing presentation mapping to describe current holdings and prioritize future acquisitions.
- Maine Lakes Environmental Association (not a land trust) is working with the towns in its jurisdiction to establish accurate landuse and phosphorus loading parameters. Critical areas are identified to effectively concentrate mitigation efforts.

Planned or Desired GIS activity and applications:

- Easement Tracking System: it would be useful for management and acquisition prioritizing to have an inventory of all easements within land trust jurisdictions.
- Web-enabled Inland Fisheries and Wildlife data to be overlaid with parcel maps for development review: This would contain deeryards and wading bird areas as well as other environmental constraints.
- Real Estate presently on the market. Would help in fundraising and rallying support for acquisition of key properties. Parcels can come on the market and change ownership before the conservation trusts even become aware of them.
- Real estate sales and comparison tools. Would be of great assistance in establishing property value of parcels being acquired and under stewardship.
- Ability to download permit applications and title transfers from county. This is an application that one of the participants saw demonstrated in California, and has great value as a development tracking and acquisition targeting tool.
- Abutters notification tools. Recent salmon habitat actions in the Sheepscot Valley Conservation Association jurisdiction required consultation of more than 300 individual landowners. Any means to streamline interaction with large numbers of landowners would be greatly welcomed.
- Buildout analysis tools to be used to present future scenarios to towns as a scare tactic.

1.1.3 Other Relevant Issues

- Some participants felt that COGs can not be relied upon to satisfy regional needs, that they are understaffed and underfunded and not technically capable of responding to municipal or land trust requests.
- Necessary or best data sources are often not available from MeGIS. It was expresssed that if you are lucky enough to know people in DOT, DEP or LURC you will be able to get much better information than is available at the 'central clearinghouse' or MeGIS. Also, MeGIS is often too busy to respond to the needs of land trusts who don't have the necessary expertise to even ask the right questions.
- Privacy and distribution of data is a key concern. While many participants were content to share data openly, others were in clear opposition to any data capture

and distribution strategy that would make conservation easements available for public consumption.

- Zoning is an important layer for land management, but there is a sense that it is poorly enforced.
- In cases where trusts are assisting or performing parcel automation for individual towns, this is serving as a wedge to introduce GIS to those communities. Bar Harbor parcels were originally digitized by a class at the College of the Atlantic. Subsequently the Assessor learned how to perform updates to keep the layer current.

1.1.4 Major Benefits and Cost Justification

Despite some skepticism about the capabilities of COGs, participants were largely in favor of regional technical trusts. If COGs could be technically enabled to serve in this capacity the trusts would have a dependable node to provide them with GIS expertise. Because the mapping needs of many of the trusts are quite modest, they would be willing to use the physical facilities of the COGs to perform their mapping and plotting work.

Trusts were also amenable to adhering to strict state standards for any data they would automate. This would serve to make the products of their automation more transferrable to others and thus serve as a more valuable currency in the data trade.

Utilizing spatial data resources that have been generated as part of comprehensive planning is another area where the trusts could benefit. If these data resources were consistently stockpiled in a geographic library at MeGIS the land trusts would use and enhance them on an ongoing basis.